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MARTYRS OF FREEDOM STRUGGLE

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SANT GURMUKH SINGH

AUGUST 05, 1871, RAIKOT (PUNJAB)



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The Kuka Movement started by Satguru Ram Singh on Baisakhi Day in 1857 was unique in many respects. When the Britishers established their full control on Punjab, the Satguru started a movement to awaken and organise the people of Punjab to get freedom from the foreign rule. In the second half of 19th century it were the Namdharis only who were conducting a movement against the British rule. The Satguru gave a call to the people for noncooperation with the British rulers. A boycott of foreign goods, facilities, government courts, schools, railways and services was given and the people were asked to use only Swadeshi goods. This is known as Kuka Postal Service also.

To give more depth to the freedom movement and have cooperation of Kashmir, Nepal, Kabul and Russia, contacts were made with those people. In Kashmir, a Kuka Platoon was also raised. Contacts were also established with the revolutionaries of 1857 living in Nepal and the people of Punjab were also moved for struggle. The British with an aim to instil a sense of slavery in the common people, encouraged cow slaughter on a large scale. Even in the holy city, blessed by the Gurus, cow slaughters was done on a large scale. This was a challenge to the Sikhs. The preaching and teaching to Satguru Ram Singh had brought an awakening among the people and they were feeling pained at the cow slaughter. When the peaceful efforts made by Hindus and Sikhs of Punjab against the cow slaughter failed to bring any results, Namdhair Sikhs rose to the occasion and acted against the people indulging in cow slaughter at Amritsar, at Baghanwali and Raikot. For this they had to face the gallows. The episode of Raikot was one of them.

On July 15, 1971, these Singhs acted against the butchers at Raikot

and finished them. There was a hue and cry all round because on the night of June 14 the persons who had attacked the butchery at Amritsar had not been apprehended as yet. In connection with this incident only Gurmukh Singh, Mangal Singh and Mastan Singh were the persons who were arrested soon. They were tried and given death sentence by hanging on July 27, 1871. Two other persons, Suba Giani Singh and Rattan Singh Naiwala were also arrested and tried for this crime.

On August 05, 1871 at Raikot (Ludhiana district of Punjab) three Namdharis Mangal Singh, Mastan Singh and Gurmukh Singh were hanged publicly in the presence of hundreds of people. In Punjab, the incident of Raikot involving Namdhari Sikhs was not the only reaction. Earlier to this on June 14-15 night Namdhari Sikhs had attacked the butchers which was a direct challenge to the British rule.

During the Khalsa Raj in Punjab there was a complete ban on cow slaughter. During that period even the British forces which passed through Punjab and even the European officers employed in the Khalsa army consumption of beef was totally banned. Even in 1847 when Britishers captured Punjab, they did not indulge in cow slaughter so that the feelings of the people are not offended. Even the plaque installed by the British Resident Lawrence on the main gate of Sri Darbar Sahib had clearly indicated "kine are not to be killed at Amritsar". But in 1849 after fully establishing their rule over Punjab, the British changed their earlier policy which clearly said "no one should be allowed to interfere with the practice by his neighbours of customs which that neighbour's religion permits".

After establishing their full control over Punjab, the British resorted to their policy of "divide and rule". Muslims were in good number in

Punjab and the British wanted to exploit their number by permitting them for cow slaughter. The Britishers consumed beef and also the Muslims and by giving licence on religion grounds, the support of Muslim community could be available to the Britishers. The Britishers were also wanted that on the issue of cow slaughter a cleavage should be created amongst the Hindu and Sikhs on the one side and the Muslims on the other. This suited their interest. On April 08, 1869 in the examination of Indian Civil Service, a note was given by the Lt. Governor of Punjab "like the issue of cartridges with animal fat, the issue of cow slaughter can snowball into a serious situation and the whole state can be entangled in communal flames". In para 17 of the same note the Lt. Governor said, (as the people think) "the Britishers themselves are beef eaters and by encouraging Muslims for this, a rift can be created between the Hindus and Muslims. The question of cow slaughter has been looming like a serious danger for about 20 years in the past and if this feeling takes roots in our native army and police in that case it will not be wrong to say that the British rule will be uprooted from a large area of India.

About the Muslim attitude about cow slaughter, the Revenue Commissioner, Punjab, G.S. Ogliven wrote "As far as leaders are concerned the religious uprising against cow slaughter is a revolt." In December 1893, in a letter to Viceroy Lansdown the Queen Victoria had also written "More attention towards Muslims as compared to Hindus is needed as they are definitely more sincere. Although the agitation against the cow slaughter is anti-Muslims but in fact it is an agitation against us."

A Persian paper in its issue of 1884 wrote "that when Muslims undertake cow slaughter they do so under the orders of British officers.

These officers want to create a rift between Hindus and Muslims."

All the instances given above make it clear that the Britishers permitted cow slaughter in Punjab after its annexation deliberately, firstly so that there are Hindu, Sikh, Muslim clashes and the rift increases amongst them, this was the part of the British policy of Divide and Rule. Secondly to win over the Muslims to stabilise the British rules because all the abovementioned reasons were due to political basis therefore the actions of Namdhari Sikhs against cow slaughter in Amritsar, Raikot and other places, although under the garb of religious thinking, was actually have political undertones. Commenting about the preaching of Satguru Ram Singh, a Maharaja from Punjab had written to the Punjab Government "it is certain that Guru Ram Singh's real motive and ambition was bent upon religious pretext to regain and acquire domination....."

On November 04, 1871, the Commissioner of Ambala wrote a long memo to the Government in which he commented after analysing the various incidents that "I think the natural deduction from the above is that the movement has become, whatever it was in its beginning, a political and not a purely religious movement.

Keeping in view all these facts, we can understand that the activities undertaken by the Namdhari Sikhs against cow slaughter were actually aimed at anti-British policy and they were basically political and not religious. In the third decade of 20th century, Mahatama Gandhi undertook Dandi March to register opposition to the Salt Law. Salt is a substance to be used in the kitchen but even then the Dandi March on account of salt was considered as a symbol against the British rule and Gandhi ji violated this law. Similarly the actions of Namdhari Sikhs against the butchers at Amritsar and Raikot was against the wrong law.

and the policy of divide and rule. These actions against butchers at Amritsar and at Raikot were completely with political aim and these should be seen in the same context.

These three Namdhari Sikhs, Gurmukh Singh, Mangal Singh and Mastan Singh who went to gallows with smile on their face laid down their lives for the country. Our true homage to these martyrs can be that they are given their proper standing in the history of country who went to the gallows by singing:-

We have to rise a revolt to push the britishers out of India

The martyrdom of these great sons of India instilled such a spirit in the countryman that the British had to leave and India became free.



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